

TEXAS A&M
UNIVERSITY
COMMERCE

**SPRING ASSEMBLY
2017**

The most frightening words in higher education:

“I don’t want you to think of it as your department’s fourth straight budget cut. You should think of it as your annual opportunity to reorganize.”



The most frightening words in higher education:

“Mr. President, the Athletic Director needs to see you immediately”



The most frightening words in higher education:

“We are going to transform the Core Curriculum for all of our students”



Take Home Lessons:

1. The Core Curriculum is in trouble. We must do better.
1. Core Curriculum reform is hard but it can work if it is faculty driven.
2. A new administrative structure is needed to support a reimagined Core Curriculum.
3. Financial incentives are important, but in the end the faculty need enough FREEDOM and SUPPORT to see that new initiatives improve learning in their own classes.



Degrees of Ignorance

By Michael W. Chune | DECEMBER 06, 2015

I was nearly 30 the first time I met an example of the new breed — a University of Michigan graduate who knew nothing beyond what was necessary to pursue his trade. It was my first job out of graduate school, and Michigan had one of the highest-ranked engineering schools in the country.

Let's call him Todd. He'd graduated a few years before. I met him at a party. He had a good job at a local engineering firm and drove a nice car. Talk turned to intellectual matters, and I soon learned that he was a creationist. He didn't seem to be aware of arguments for the other side. He was surprised to learn that Russia had fought in World War II. He'd done well in AP high-school English, which had gotten him out of having to



Photo illustration by Jonathan Barkat for The Chronicle Review

take literature classes, and he hadn't read a book since graduating from college. "Most

"An example of the new breed...A University of Michigan graduate....He had a good job at a local engineering firm and drove a nice car"

"He was surprised to learn Russia had fought in World War II"

"He'd done well in AP high-school English, which had gotten him out of having to take literature classes, and he hadn't read a book since graduating from college"

THE COMMISSION OF 125 IS A GROUP OF CITIZENS CONVENED TO EXPRESS A VISION OF HOW THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS CAN BEST SERVE TEXAS AND THE LARGER SOCIETY DURING THE NEXT 25 YEARS. THE COMMISSION WAS PROPOSED DURING THE 2001–2002 ACADEMIC YEAR, 125 YEARS AFTER THE CONSTITUTION OF 1876 MANDATED THAT TEXAS ESTABLISH “A UNIVERSITY OF THE FIRST CLASS.” IN THE SPIRIT OF THAT MANDATE, THE GROUP WAS NAMED THE COMMISSION OF 125.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE ONE: A NEW CORE CURRICULUM
Develop a new undergraduate core curriculum to better prepare students for lives of accomplishment.

The modern world presents challenges that our graduates must be prepared to meet. In particular, they must learn to achieve in a world made smaller by technology and even more complex by the importance of different cultures and peoples. A narrow education, no matter how deep in its field, will not be sufficient. Future citizens will need to think critically and have a confident grasp of the arts, the humanities, mathematics, science, and technology.

**REPORT OF THE TASK
FORCE ON
CURRICULAR REFORM**

A TASK FORCE APPOINTED
JOINTLY BY THE PRESIDENT, THE
PROVOST, AND THE CHAIR OF THE
FACULTY COUNCIL

OCTOBER 27, 2005



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

1. Create a new structure, the School of Undergraduate Studies (UGS), led by a new academic dean to support academic change and oversee the Core Curriculum
2. Create a more supportive home for new students without majors
3. Creation of Signature Courses
4. Creation of the Flag program for a reimagined Core Curriculum

The 42-hour Core Curriculum – State of Texas

Mathematics – 3 hrs

Social and Behavioral Sciences – 3 hrs

Visual and Performing Arts – 3 hrs

Humanities – 3 hrs

Host Institution Choice: **UT Austin Signature Course – 3 hrs**

Rhetoric and Writing – 6 hrs

US History – 6 hrs

US Government – 6 hrs

Natural Sciences and Technology – 9 hrs

42 hrs



STRATEGIC INITIATIVE ONE: A NEW CORE CURRICULUM
Develop a new undergraduate core curriculum to better prepare students for lives of accomplishment.

The combination of Signature Courses and Flags were created to build on the foundation of the 42-hour state core while responding to the Commission of 125's call to better prepare the future leaders of Texas.

After being approved by the faculty council in 2006, we are proud to announce that all incoming students at the University of Texas at Austin will be required to take a Signature Course and satisfy the Flag requirements.

Faculty Governance at its best. Both the Signature Courses and Flags are overseen by faculty committees with representatives from all of the different schools and colleges at UT.



STRATEGIC INITIATIVE ONE: A NEW CORE CURRICULUM

Develop a new undergraduate core curriculum to better prepare students for lives of accomplishment.

The combination of Signature Courses and Flags were created to build on the foundation of the 42-hour state core while responding to the Commission of 125's call to better prepare the future leaders of Texas.

Signature Courses

Connect first-year students with distinguished faculty through rigorous interdisciplinary classes that transition new students to the academic expectations of college.

Taught by over **200 faculty** from all colleges and schools

220 courses provide **11,000 seats**



STRATEGIC INITIATIVE ONE: A NEW CORE CURRICULUM
Develop a new undergraduate core curriculum to better prepare students for lives of accomplishment.

All Signature Courses contain:

Distinguished Senior Faculty – Provide inspiration, not just information

Interdisciplinary, Contemporary Content – Faculty member's choice

Critical Thinking – The most important element – Students must defend original thoughts

Writing – The second most important element

Oral Communication – Often neglected but key to a successful career

Information Literacy – Good vs. bad information

Gems of the University – Libraries, collections, performances, etc.

University Lecture Series – “Concert-sized” shared academic lectures



STRATEGIC INITIATIVE ONE: A NEW CORE CURRICULUM
Develop a new undergraduate core curriculum to better prepare students for lives of accomplishment.

Course titles include:

Philanthropy: Power of Giving, Young People & Drugs, Really Bad Bugs, Debt: The Good, Bad & Ugly, Interactive Ocean, Shakespeare and the Pursuit of Happiness, African-Americans in Sport, From Numbers to Chaos, Medical Ethics, Sustaining a Planet, Age of Globalization, Spies, Sleep: Are We Getting Enough? The Prehistory of Food, Pursuit of Happiness, How to Change the World, Dante's Hell and Its Afterlife, Digital Media, Technology and Learning, Capturing Creativity, Anti-Americanism, Genetically Modified Organisms, Indigenous Women Writers, Imagining America, Emerging Markets



STRATEGIC INITIATIVE ONE: A NEW CORE CURRICULUM

Develop a new undergraduate core curriculum to better prepare students for lives of accomplishment.

“My Signature Course was the only class where I could explore things outside my major and talk about real world issues. Today, I have spoken in front of 60,000 high school students to share the lessons I learned in class; your voice matters, and it can change the world.”

“I took a class on English words and their origins and was amazed. As a mechanical engineering student, this class was very different from my major classes and added a lot to my undergraduate experience!”

“The course was one of my favorites I've taken at UT. It was over something completely different than anything else I've studied. It improved my writing, and I read books I probably never would have read otherwise. The professor of this course is probably my favorite professor of my undergraduate career and I took one of her English classes afterwards!”



STRATEGIC INITIATIVE ONE: A NEW CORE CURRICULUM
Develop a new undergraduate core curriculum to better prepare students for lives of accomplishment.

How the Program Works:

1. In consultation with department chairs, faculty propose individual courses every one or two years.
2. Committee with representatives from all major schools evaluate proposals.
3. Proposed courses are evaluated based on potential impact on students and stature/past teaching performance of faculty member.
4. Last year we evaluated 270 proposals for 220 courses.



STRATEGIC INITIATIVE ONE: A NEW CORE CURRICULUM
Develop a new undergraduate core curriculum to better prepare students for lives of accomplishment.

How the Program Works:

1. In consultation with department chairs, faculty propose individual courses every one or two years.
2. Committee with representatives from all major schools evaluate proposals.
3. Proposed courses are evaluated based on potential impact on students and stature/past teaching performance of faculty member.
4. Last year we evaluated 270 proposals for 220 courses.

Only program on campus that has an active quality filter.



STRATEGIC INITIATIVE ONE: A NEW CORE CURRICULUM
Develop a new undergraduate core curriculum to better prepare students for lives of accomplishment.

Why the Program Works:

1. The new School of Undergraduate Studies was created to oversee this and other college-bridging academic programs.
2. UT's most distinguished faculty are allowed to teach the subject content about which they are most passionate.
3. Departments are compensated financially based on level of participation and class size.



STRATEGIC INITIATIVE ONE: A NEW CORE CURRICULUM

Develop a new undergraduate core curriculum to better prepare students for lives of accomplishment.

Why the Program Works:

1. The new School of Undergraduate Studies was created to oversee this and other college-bridging academic programs.
2. UT's most distinguished faculty are allowed to teach the subject content about which they are most passionate.
3. Departments are compensated financially based on level of participation and class size.

Would **NOT** have worked solely based on a funded *or* unfunded mandate from the top or if faculty did not enjoy the freedom of teaching content of **their** choosing.



STRATEGIC INITIATIVE ONE: A NEW CORE CURRICULUM
Develop a new undergraduate core curriculum to better prepare students for lives of accomplishment.

Signature Courses

Signature Course assessment served as the QEP during our latest SACS accreditation.

However, higher education is as much about *student inspiration* as it is about them learning *information*.

Although much more difficult, we are also assessing inspiration provided by the Signature Course program.



STRATEGIC INITIATIVE ONE: A NEW CORE CURRICULUM
Develop a new undergraduate core curriculum to better prepare students for lives of accomplishment.

What Signature Courses are Not:

1. They are not “Surviving College 101” courses.
2. Students are also required to be part of a Freshman Interest Group (FIG) or related once-a-week seminar for no course credit.
3. FIGS focus on student life and adjustment issues, run by advising staff with older student peer mentors (who receive special training the semester before).
4. Signature Courses are rigorous 3 hour classes with a purely academic focus.



FIRST-YEAR INTEREST GROUPS



Prospective Students

Current Students

Parents

Courses & Clusters

Contact Us

ugs : first-year interest groups



First-Year Interest Groups

A First-Year Interest Group (FIG) is a group of 18-25 first-year students who take two to four classes together during their first fall semester at UT. Each group attends a weekly seminar led by a **peer mentor** and a staff facilitator. FIG students develop a sense of community as they attend classes, study, and participate in various activities and events with their mentor and fellow first-years. View current **FIG course clusters**.

Students discuss issues like

- study and time management strategies
- campus life and involvement opportunities
- social opportunities and issues



Be a FIG Mentor



Mentor Profiles



STRATEGIC INITIATIVE ONE: A NEW CORE CURRICULUM
Develop a new undergraduate core curriculum to better prepare students for lives of accomplishment.

What else do we need for a reimagined Core Curriculum?

Playing Defense: We need to make up for being forced to accept credit for high school AP courses/Dual Credit – these are mostly Core Curriculum courses. Perhaps related, we also battle negative student attitudes about the Core Curriculum. Students increasingly see the Core as something to “get around” with a “path of least resistance.”

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE ONE: A NEW CORE CURRICULUM
Develop a new undergraduate core curriculum to better prepare students for lives of accomplishment.

What else do we need for a reimagined
Core Curriculum?

Playing Offense: We need to fill in gaps that exist in the 42-hour core.

Key Challenge: We cannot add any additional courses.

Key Insight: **Require Essential Skills and Experiences, NOT courses.**

Our answer: **Flags**

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE ONE: A NEW CORE CURRICULUM
Develop a new undergraduate core curriculum to better prepare students for lives of accomplishment.

What else do we need for a reimagined
Core Curriculum?

Playing Offense: We need to fill in gaps that exist in the 42-hour core.

Key Challenge: We cannot add any additional courses.

Key Insight: **Require Essential Skills and Experiences, NOT courses.**

Our answer: **Flags** (Invent a name and you “OWN” IT)

Flags: Essential skills and experiences for this century.

Cultural Diversity in the United States: Examines the variety and richness of the American cultural experience.

Global Cultures: Examines various cultural groups outside the United States.

Ethics and Leadership: Equips students to make ethical decisions in their adult and professional lives.

Quantitative Reasoning: Improves understanding of quantitative arguments.



Flags: Essential skills and experiences for this century.

Independent Inquiry: Independent investigation of a question, problem, or project related to their major.

Writing: Improves the quality of students' writing.

Writing: Improves the quality of students' writing.

Writing: Improves the quality of students' writing.



Major Announcement:

Beginning with the class entering in the fall of 2016:

All students are required to satisfy all six Flag requirements

Building Capacity for 10 Years

160,000 Seats taken in flagged classes this past year, an increase of 10% over the previous year.

2,752 Courses carried one more flags last year, an increase of 12% over the previous year.

>40% Of all seats taken in undergraduate courses carry one or more flags.

Ethics and Leadership Flag

The Ethics and Leadership requirement equips students with the tools necessary for making ethical decisions in your adult and professional life. Courses carrying this flag expose you to ethical issues and to the process of applying ethical reasoning in real-life situations.

“At least one-third of the course grade must be based on work in practical ethics, i.e., the study of what is involved in making real-life ethical choices.”



Ethics and Leadership Flag

“History 316L: The United States Since 1865”

Professor Megan Seaholm

“Public Relations 378: Communicating Sustainability”

Professor Lucy Atkinson

“Nursing 321: Ethics in Healthcare”

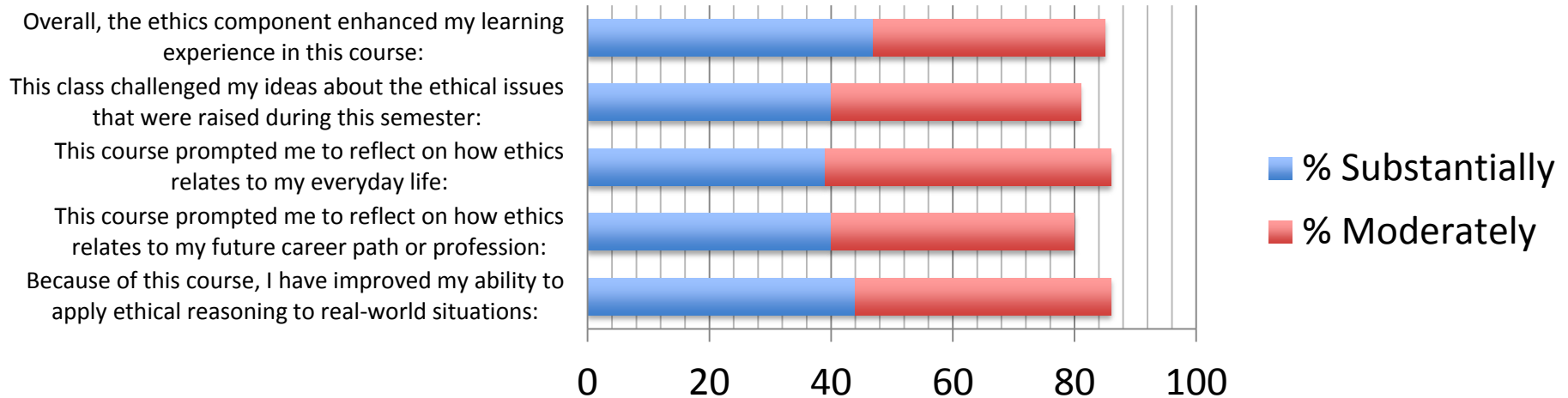
Professor Gayle Timmerman



Assessment

Ethics and Leadership Student Survey

- Fall 2014 Survey of all EL-flagged courses across campus
- 2,934 Completed Surveys



“I feel that the ethics portion of this course truly enhanced the course material, since it provided a way for me to learn more about current events and their ethical dimensions. It certainly has helped me evaluate the ethical dimensions of real-world issues.”

Assessment

Ethics and Leadership Rubric Evaluation

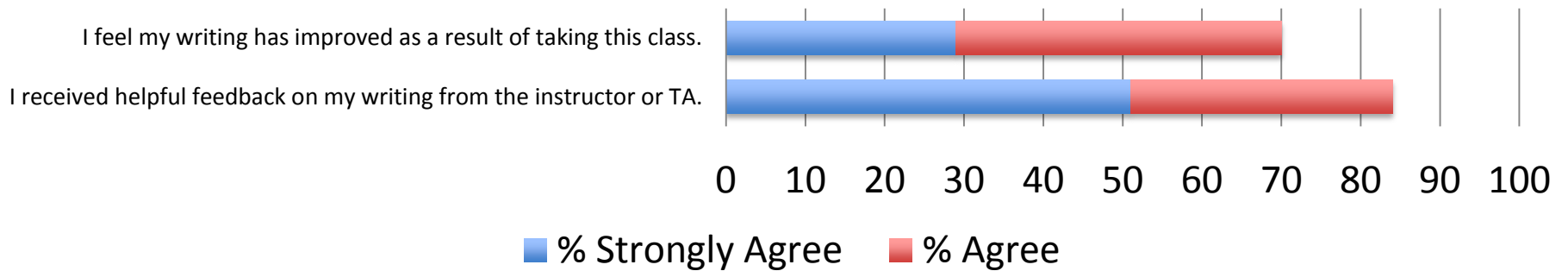
- Rubric applied to samples of student work from 4 Spring 2015 courses from Government, History, and Music.
- Total of 319 student work samples assessed.

CRITERION	% MEETING OR EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS
Recognition of ethical issues in complex situations	84%
Familiarity with the vocabulary of practical ethics	63%
Articulation and critical evaluation of ethical viewpoints	53%
Application of ethical lens to arguments involving ethical issues	66%

Assessment

Writing Flag Student Survey

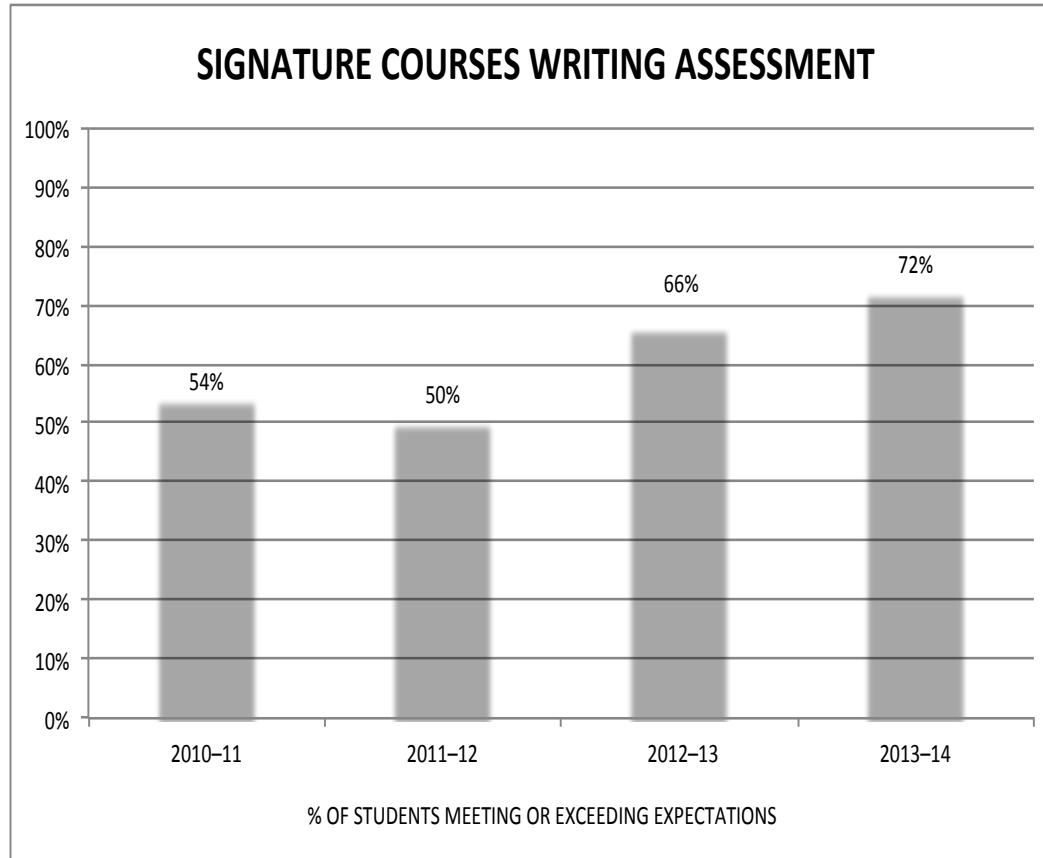
- Fall 2014 Survey of all WR-flagged courses across campus
- 2,625 Completed Surveys



Assessment

Writing Rubric Evaluation

- Rubric applied to thousands of samples of student work from various Signature Courses.



Assessment

How to Improve Instruction: Faculty Writing Retreats

2-Day Retreats, Serving Faculty from 9 Colleges/Schools

“This was the most valuable professional development workshop I have ever been a part of.”

“The group interactions were inspiring, lively, engaging, and immediately useful to make changes in my course documents.”

“The info was living and breathing useful – made changes in my syllabus and assignments as we worked.”



STRATEGIC INITIATIVE ONE: A NEW CORE CURRICULUM
Develop a new undergraduate core curriculum to better prepare students for lives of accomplishment.

How the Flag Program Works:

1. Faculty Council developed specific definitions of each Flag.
2. Committees with representatives from all major schools evaluate proposals.
3. Proposed courses are evaluated based on adherence to specific Flag definition.
1. Failed proposals are sent back to faculty with specific suggestions.



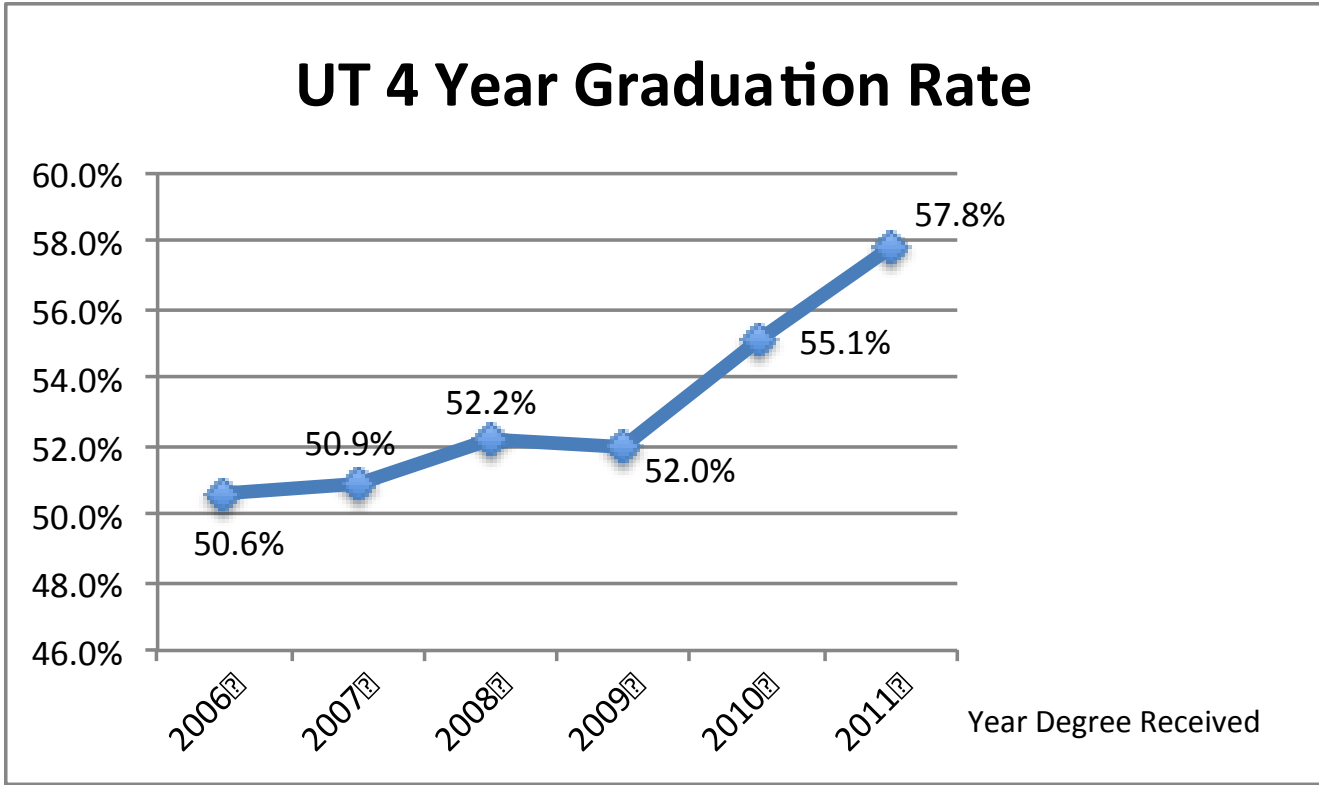
STRATEGIC INITIATIVE ONE: A NEW CORE CURRICULUM
Develop a new undergraduate core curriculum to better prepare students for lives of accomplishment.

Why the Flag program works:

1. Faculty find that adding Flag components enhance their courses by providing an additional and important new intellectual framework.
2. Enrollments in classes are increased when a Flag is added and increased course enrollment is now incentivized financially at UT.
3. Would **NOT** have worked if faculty did **NOT** see that the Flag added important new pedagogy to their course.



UT 4 Year Graduation Rate



Take Home Lessons:

1. The Core Curriculum is in trouble. We must do better.
1. Core Curriculum reform is hard but it can work if it is faculty driven.
2. A new administrative structure is needed to support a reimagined Core Curriculum.
3. Financial incentives are important, but in the end the faculty need enough FREEDOM and SUPPORT to see that new initiatives improve learning in their own classes.





Former UT President Bill Powers and Paul Woodruff, the inaugural dean of the School of Undergraduate Studies, deserve most of the credit for getting this far.

My Final Thought: Curriculum reform is not a destination, it is a journey. The right approach is to build in a mechanism for constant change and improvement – that is the true value of the School of Undergraduate Studies and my position.